



State Representative • 3rd District

Timm Ormsby

2008 Capitol Report

State Representative
Timm Ormsby

Spokane

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Housing
Rules
State Government & Tribal Affairs
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Education

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Dear Friends –

Last year the Legislature and Gov. Gregoire, working together, produced a trio of budgets – operating, capital and transportation – that were applauded by people from one end of the political spectrum to the other. We arrived at the Capitol in January 2007 with an agenda that emphasized schools, jobs, health care, family security and a clean environment. Four months later we headed for home with a record of accomplishment – and we left behind a rainy day reserve of \$724 million.

The 2008 session started at just about the same time we were learning that state revenue projections were falling off. The usual pessimists told anyone who would listen that they'd better hold onto their wallets, because the majority Democrats would burn through the rainy day fund and then hike every tax in sight.

Well, they were wrong. Again. Instead, we kept our eyes on our common-sense agenda. We made focused, strategic investments in Washington's people – affordable housing, good jobs, education reform, the environment, public safety – and saved money in other areas. We produced a no-new-taxes budget. In the end we saved more than \$125 million to add to the state's savings account, leaving \$850 million to guard against future tax increases or cuts in vital public services.

Here you'll see a condensed report on what we were able to accomplish during this year's short, 60-day session. If you want to learn more, or you have suggestions for things we ought to consider next year, please contact me or my able assistant, Shannon Waechter, at our Spokane legislative office. The session's over, but we're on the job year 'round. It's an honor to work for the people of Spokane.

Thanks.

Timm Ormsby

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Affordable Housing

Back in 2005 a colleague who knows that I'm interested in affordable housing sent me a news clipping with an ominous headline: **American Dream Out of Americans' Reach**. The story said that housing prices had gotten so high that tens of millions of American families had no chance of homeownership. The ripple effect of those home prices was putting decent, liveable apartments beyond their grasp, as well. Whenever someone asks me why I sponsor housing-related legislation every year in Olympia, I think about that news story and what I can do for the folks back home. Instead of talking about the American dream, I answer by talking about reality.

The reality is that people need a decent place to start their day. Our kids need the security of waking up and going to sleep in the same bed every morning and night. We



all need a place to come back to at the end of a day, and we need to know that we can afford to keep it. I'm a strong supporter of programs designed to help people better their economic circumstances, but I'm enough of a realist to know that people can't take full advantage of those opportunities if they don't have a place to clean up in the morning or a table to sit at and study in the evening. And from a purely

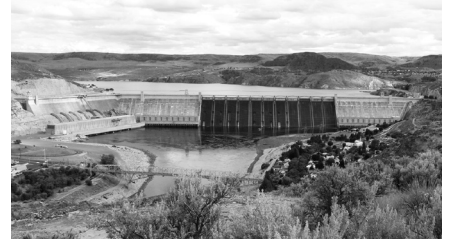
practical standpoint, investments in housing save taxpayers real money on the things we fund in lieu of decent, affordable housing: mental health facilities, shelters, prison beds, substance-abuse and domestic-violence programs, and emergency room visits.

The most important steps the Legislature took this year to help put affordable housing within reach of more Washington families were laid out in my House Bill 3180. There were 11 main parts of the bill, and each was funded in the budget and/or adopted by the relevant state agency. Among the highlights:

- The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (DCTED) is required to identify strategies to reduce costs associated with affordable housing projects financed through the Housing Trust Fund (HTF).
- A loan program is created to help organizations develop affordable-housing projects while waiting for final funding from other sources.
- Affordable-housing projects funded by the HTF are exempted from certain relocation assistance and property acquisition requirements.
- A new DCTED program will help non-profits develop or expand affordable-housing programs.

Another housing bill I sponsored this year was signed into law on March 20 by Gov. Gregoire, who has been a strong ally in my housing efforts. This one exempts from sales tax the weatherization items purchased by local governments and non-profits to help low-income families stay warm and save energy at the same time. One Spokane non-profit, Spokane Neighborhood Action Programs, said the savings will help them weatherize an additional eight to 10 homes a year. This is going to cost the state little in terms of tax collections, but it will mean the world to families all over the state and to the communities where they live.

Historic Water Agreement



After working closely with Gov. Gregoire, lawmakers, federal officials, farmers, tribes, cities, counties and environmentalists, I was honored when the governor asked me this year to sponsor a House companion bill to Sen. Lisa Brown's Senate legislation implementing the landmark Columbia River Management Program act of 2006. That act set the goal of providing new sources of water for in-stream and out-of-stream uses in eastern Washington. This year our task was to make it happen.

The gist of the historic agreement is that as needed, Lake Roosevelt will be drawn down to provide water for downstream water rights and stream flows. Among the challenges: Minimize or eliminate completely the impact on northeastern counties, and at the same time avoid harming the recreational, economic or energy-producing potential of the lake. The Senate bill we ultimately passed will help Odessa farmers keep their farms. Water will flow to downstream communities while keeping northeastern counties whole. Water will be available for drought relief. And we will keep our pledge to provide water for salmon. We're also taking another important step — partnering with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Spokane Tribe of Indians to create economic prosperity and ecological sustainability along the Columbia River. Without their willingness to work with us, this historic opportunity would not have been possible.

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It's always an honor to stand up on the House floor and speak on behalf of the people of Spokane.

Making Washington Safer

In my work as a lawmaker I've come to have a great deal of respect for our law-enforcement professionals. When we lawmakers do our jobs and give law enforcement effective –

and constitutional – new laws, they can do their jobs, helping Washington residents feel, and be, safer. The bills we sent to Gov. Gregoire this session will increase campus safety, protect domestic-violence victims, expand the use of ignition interlocks in drunk drivers' cars, come down hard on sex offenders who fail to register, and get a handle on the criminal gang activity that is affecting growing numbers of Washington communities, including Spokane.



Education

Some of my most gratifying work in Olympia is done as a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. That new panel deals with education policy, but we also focus on the essential questions that underlie every policy decision made in

the Legislature: How much will it cost, and how do we pay for it? Even with a tight purse this year, we were able to strengthen our schools, which is something I promised in the legislative preview I sent out several months ago.

The Legislature kept its commitment to expand the free all-day kindergarten program. We ordered a revised and improved math curriculum. Funds were allocated

to help school librarians do their jobs, to shrink class sizes, and at the college level to remove barriers that make it difficult or impossible for students to transfer credits between schools. We also gave teachers and school employees a much-needed, long-overdue cost-of-living increase. These vital professionals are still underpaid, both in my opinion and according to the terms of the voter-approved Initiative 732. I won't declare victory until we're finally caught up.



Career and Technical Education

When I joined the Legislature in 2003, career and technical education was not a high-profile issue. The goal then was to give every student access to the tools necessary for a career in science, medicine, business, the law, the high-tech world . . . and that's a worthy goal. But not enough attention was being paid to the fact that not every student wants to take those routes. In the last few years, we've succeeded in providing Opportunity Grants to help students receive instruction in high-demand fields; improved outreach for apprenticeship programs; created a skills-based pilot project for high-school students called Running Start for the Trades; and invested in Washington's public high school skills centers, to upgrade their facilities and buy new equipment to help students learn trades as varied as auto mechanics, construction, cooking, medical assisting and computer programming. This year's budget assists students by increasing the availability of career and technical education classes at skills centers and regular high schools throughout the state.



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Capital Budget = Jobs

A University of Washington study a few years ago found that for every million dollars spent on new construction, 30.8 new jobs are created, primarily in construction and related industries. Using a conservative interpretation of that figure, 60 family-wage jobs with benefits will be generated in the 3rd legislative district by the supplemental capital budget. This year's spending plan provides \$1,100,000 to the Spokane's Mobius Science Center, and an even million dollars to the YMCA/YWCA "Your 'Y' Capital Campaign." I'm



also happy to have helped secure \$100,000 this session for the Armed Forces and Aerospace Museum at Spokane International Airport in the neighboring 6th district to allow them time to demonstrate local support. Overall, the 2007-09 capital budget pumped nearly \$30,000,000 into the heart of Spokane.

In other capital-budget news, I was appointed by the Speaker of the House last year to sit on the Study Committee on Public Infrastructure Programs and Funding Structures. Our first task was to try to fit that name onto a single piece of stationery. After we gave up and decided to go with just "the committee," we began a top-to-bottom examination of the way the state allocates the billions of dollars in its capital budget. The amount available is always less than the requests for funding. Our recommendations to the Legislature are even bulkier than the committee's official title, but I can summarize them in a single word: Prioritize. In practice, that means we'll give first consideration to projects that come to the Legislature as neatly wrapped up as possible. Are stakeholders agreed on the details? Will the project blend in with the neighborhood? Is it the best possible use of available land? If it is a major building project, is there infrastructure in place to support it? And, as they used to say during the gas-rationing days of World War II, "Is this trip necessary?" I'm happy to say that, looking back at requests that have come to the Legislature from Spokane for many years, the answer to these questions is generally "yes." That's a testament to the integrity and responsibility of our local leaders, institutions and people.

Health Care

In an off-budget year, making significant progress on an issue as unwieldy as health care was a challenge, but not nearly as big as the health-care challenges families face every day. Inaction wasn't an option. This year we passed legislation to implement the 2007 Health Insurance Partnership act, to make it possible for small businesses to offer insurance to low-wage workers without going out of business. We granted the Washington State Insurance Commissioner authority to review proposed rate increases on individual health-insurance policies and say no when necessary. We set meaningful new standards for mental-health counselors, and we passed a new law offering improved protection to consumers purchasing long-term care insurance.



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